

## Short film collection is a visual history of Pixar Animation Studios

Posted by [mkleinsc](#) November 02, 2007 04:59AM

A desire to prove the ability of new computer hardware and software led a group of technicians at LucasFilm Ltd. in 1984 to create a 90-second animated film titled "The Adventures of Andre and Wally B."

Despite the film's artistic limitations, it excited animators at a graphic artists conference, who realized that computer animation was becoming a viable field, no longer limited to flat, unshaded and untextured colors, and the simplest of geometric shapes. The technology could be used to tell a story.

Soon after, Apple executive Steve Jobs and other investors bought The Graphics Group from George Lucas, hired away the techies responsible for the division's work, and set up the division as its own company, bringing in John Lasseter -- an actual animator -- to provide the creative juice for the newly rechristened Pixar Animation Studios.

The "Pixar Short Films Collection, Vol. 1," which is being released to DVD on Tuesday in conjunction with the DVD release of the summer hit "Ratatouille," provides a visual history of Pixar and computer animation.



Jack-Jack, the harmless-looking infant from 'The Incredibles,' reveals his superpower in 'Jack-Jack Attack,' one of 13 computer-animated works included in the 'Pixar Short Films Collection, Vol. 1,' which arrives Tuesday on DVD.

The 13 films include the studio's first official film, "Luxo Jr.," which is referenced in Pixar's animated logo, in which an artist's lamp mischievously tamps down the "I" in "Pixar."

The films can be divided into three rough categories: early films that experimented with the technology, later works created for the animators' own amusement and follow-ups to the feature films for which Pixar has become famous.

That's why the disc includes guest appearances from Mike (voice of Billy Crystal) and Sulley (voice of John Goodman) from "Monsters, Inc." in the Oscar-nominated "Mike's New Car"; from Lightning McQueen (voice of Owen Wilson) and Mater (voice of Larry the Cable Guy) from "Cars" in "Mater and the Ghostlight"; and from Jack-Jack, the infant from "The Incredibles," who finally reveals his superpower in

"Jack-Jack Attack."

The collection includes three winners of the Oscar for best animated short: the beautifully rendered "Geri's Game" (1997), the amusing "For the Birds" (2001) and, most interestingly, "Tin Toy" (1988).

If produced today, "Tin Toy" wouldn't stand a chance. The rudimentary nature of the work shows just how far the genre has come in 20 years. The film, about a toy with conflicting emotions, co-stars a grotesque, slobbering infant who looks for all the world like the even more demonic sibling of the infamous Dancing Baby that once was an Internet phenomenon and appeared on "Ally McBeal." It's creepy.

In addition to the three Oscar winners, the collection includes four Oscar nominees: the previously mentioned "Mike's New Car" (2002); "Boundin'" (2003), about a sheep mortified by a shearing; "Lifted" (2006), about an incompetent young alien struggling to learn how to abduct humans; and, best of all, "One Man Band" (2005), about two street musicians whose greed gets the better of them as they compete for a young girl's coin.

"One Man Band," which plays like a classic silent film, is a beautifully designed interpretation of the Italian Renaissance. Each of the musicians, dressed as if it's Carnival in Venice, plays a unique tune that grows more elaborate as the film progresses. Ultimately, the two tunes fit together like the parts of a fugue. This is sophisticated work and underscores the importance of the Pixar shorts in providing an opportunity for up-and-coming animators to test their wings.

The discovery of this jewel is well worth the investment in the collection. The only downside is that the Pixar logo loop plays before almost every short, meaning viewers get to see it every five minutes or so. That cute little lamp quickly wears out its welcome.

The DVD includes an informative 20-minute documentary about Pixar history. Each short also has a commentary track provided by the animators who created it. The shorter the film, the faster the animators have to talk. That alone can be entertaining.

Suggestion for "Vol. 2": Make it a two-hour disc and allow the animators to deliver their commentary as an introduction to each short. That also would spread out the instances of the Pixar logo loop. A DVD set-up option could be provided to play the shorts by themselves, for those who don't want to learn anything from the animators.

Animation buffs also might want to check out Tuesday's releases of "Ratatouille" and "The Chuck Jones Collection," which features six of the legendary animator's classic television specials, including "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi" and "A Cricket in Times Square."

## PIXAR SHORT FILMS COLLECTION, VOL. 1

3½ stars

**Voices:** John Goodman, Billy Crystal, Owen Wilson and Larry the Cable Guy. **Directors:** Various. **Rating:** Unrated; merits G, for all audiences. **Running time:** 54 minutes.

**Also arriving this week**

*Release dates are subject to change.*

*(N) denotes a Newhouse review.*

**Ratatouille** 3 stars (G, 2007) A rodent who dreams of being a chef goes to Paris, where he secretly finds a job in a fine restaurant. This latest film from "Incredibles" animator Brad Bird isn't as inventive as his earlier work (and some audiences might find a movie about rats in a kitchen less than appealing), but children will find the pace lively, and parents might be relieved to find some family entertainment that doesn't rely on rude dialogue or ruder noises. DVD includes deleted scenes, interviews and a couple of animated short films. A few scenes of animals in peril. 1 hour 51 minutes. (N)

**I Now Pronounce You Chuck and Larry** 2 stars (PG-13, 2007) Director Dennis Dugan's middling satire stars Adam Sandler and Kevin James as firefighters who pretend to be a romantic couple for domestic partnership benefits. The movie supports gay rights, yet features a dismaying amount of slurs and stereotypes. While there are laughs, thanks to the rapport between Sandler and James, the comedy ultimately mocks the people it's supposed to be championing. Jessica Biel costars as an attorney with bondage gear. DVD includes audio commentary, deleted scenes, outtakes and behind-the-scenes footage. Violence, sexual content, brief nudity, strong language, alcohol abuse and drug references. 1 hour 56 minutes. (N)

## OTHER RELEASES

### Tuesday

Amazing Journey: The Story of The Who

The Chuck Jones Collection

Coen Brothers Gift Set

The Crown Prince

Deck the Halls

A Dennis the Menace Christmas

Doctor Who: 3rd Series

Doodlebops: Happy Doodle Holidays

Flight of the Conchords: 1st Season

Full House: Complete Series

Gilligan's Island: Complete Series

Helvetica

James Bond Ultimate Collector's Set

The King of Queens: Complete Series

Kung Fu: Complete Series

Married in America 2

Martin: 3rd Season

Milton Berle Collection

MXC: Most Extreme Elimination Challenge -- Vol. 3

The Pink Panther: A Pink Christmas

Princes in the Tower

Project Runway: 3rd Season

Rich and Famous

Seinfeld: Complete Series

Seinfeld: Season 9

Sesame Street: Old School, Vol. 2

Sicko  
Wildfire: Season 2  
Wings: 5th Season  
Wonder Woman: Complete Collection  
The X-Files: Ultimate Collection

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